

A• Well, we haven't gotten me to Mobile District yet. I graduated in June and reported to the Mobile District in September. This was my first assignment, right here.

I arrived here in September 1929. I was known as a student officer in those days. The idea was to spread you around and let you get a smattering of experience with everything in the District. Interestingly enough, in the summer of 1929 I spent weekends at West Point, my mother and father being stationed there. I worked for the "Delay, Linger, and Wait" Railroad, The Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western, the summer of graduation, and this started me off to financial success because I got \$125 or \$140 a month for two months. I lived in my aunt's house out in New Jersey with nobody else there, they left me in the house. Because I was working for the railroad I had a pass, so I rode free back and forth to Hoboken, where the office was. So I'd come home every night, nobody else around, and I'd take in another girl and another nightclub, or roadhouse or something every night.. I lived on one salary and put the other one away. I was really just doing fine. I went up to West Point nearly every weekend because I could go to the cadet dances and late date the best looking girls. That happened to me when I was a cadet, and I was enjoying getting it back.

On one occasion I ran into a friend of mine **from** the same company who had been a class behind me and found out he was being suspended for a year. He had gotten drunk on a Philadelphia trip for the ordnance. I said, "**Well**, what are you going to do?" He said, "I don't know, I've got to do something. I have no means of support." I said, "Why don't you come with me? I'm going to the Mobile District. There's only one officer down there, and I'll be the second officer, so I'll be a big shot. You come on, and I'll get you a job." He said, "Do you really mean it?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Fine, I'll do it." So when I left that weekend to go back and get ready to report to the Mobile District, I took this boy with me, Jerry Williams, and we drove down in that same little Studebaker.<sup>22</sup>

On the way I told him, "We ought to go by Eufala, because there are a couple of girls there, one family with five gorgeous babes in it, we ought **to go** by there and let **me** show you what there is in that part of the world.": I had been there visiting my Alabama roommate right after graduation and had met one of these girls. So we went by that way, stopped in Eufala, intending to spend one night. We enjoyed it, so we stayed a couple of nights. Then we blew out a tire, which took all our money. We started off for Mobile, one day late, from Eufala, Alabama, driving across country. We figured that nobody in the Mobile District office would know whether we were late or not because nobody would pay any attention on Sunday. We pulled in here Sunday night. They had just built the Cochran Bridge, and it was \$1.25 toll. When we got to that darn bridge, we had \$1.50 between us and we hadn't eaten any lunch to economize, and we just had enough gas to dribble into town. We tried our best to talk our way through that place, and we said we were going to go around. The man said, "Well, **you** can if you want to, but it will cost you more for gas than \$1.25." So we paid him.

We didn't have sense enough to **go** to the biggest hotel and just check in and sign for dinner. We looked for the crummiest boardinghouse we could find, and because we had so many pieces of baggage, the woman let us in there without making us pay in advance. I said, "Well, we'll go look up this District Engineer [Lt. Col. William **D.A. Anderson**], because he knew my father, and maybe his wife will invite us in to eat supper."<sup>23</sup> So we went out and sat in front of that house for three or four hours, and they were away for the weekend. So we ended up spending our quarter for one milkshake, which we split.

The next morning we reported to the District office the minute the doors opened. I'd never met this man, and he'd never met me. He said, "Is there anything we can **do** for you now?" I said, "Yes, sir, you can introduce us to the bank so we can get a check cashed. We haven't eaten for over 24 hours." Well, he took care of that. I told him I had Jerry Williams with me, and I thought he might be able to find a job. He had to go back a year later. I did a pretty good job because this was on

a Monday morning and by Wednesday morning Jerry Williams and I were both in Jasper, Alabama, ax in hand, cutting line for a survey party. We both had the same job! That was extremely interesting. I enjoyed it. I went from ax man to rod man to instrument man to chief of the party in two months. He went a little slower, but **not too much**.

Then I got sent back to the District office to work on the notes from the surveying. I got back here about the first of November, and I had taken the advice of the District Engineer to board with Mama Leatherbury, who headed a large, socially prominent family here, hit by the loss of the husband and the Depression and living in a big old house on Government Street. They were taking in boarders to exist, and they let me come in. It was a smart move socially. You had it made once you got in there. **I got** invited to the Bachelor's Ball at the country club, where I found out they had all the **girls lined up around** the wall and all the **men are** supposed to come by and shake hands with them. **Of** course, everybody in the place knew each other except me. I didn't know a soul, and I soon got awful tired of explaining who I was as I went around. So finally, I just said, "I'm Mr. Smith."

**When** I got to where Jeanne Herman was standing--she was in the line and had just graduated from the University of Alabama and had come down here to teach school--I was Mr. Smith. I always say that she thought I was one of the Smith Bakery people here in town, and that's why she chased me so hard! We hit it off pretty well. I got sent back up to the Birmingham area to inspect on an aerial survey job, but I came back down along about the middle of January, and we got ourselves engaged one night. The next day a delegation visited me and asked if I would be a knight in the Mardi Gras. The friend of one of the maids was from out of town, and he couldn't make it. If I would do it, I would have no expenses, all my requirements would be taken care of. I thought this was something **to avoid and** that the District Engineer would never let me do it, so I said, "I'll be glad to do it if the District Engineer wants me to." I went in and reported to him and he said, "My goodness, that's the best advertisement this District has ever had! Go ahead and do it." Then I had to explain to my

fiancee. She said, "Well, if we let it be known we're engaged, neither one of us will get invited to many things, but if we don't, I'll get a lot of invitations, and you as a member of the Court will go to everything. So let's go ahead, let's don't say anything." I said, "I've got to tell the girl." She said, "Sure." So I told my maid before I accepted that I really was engaged to another lady. She knew Jeanne, and she said, "If she doesn't mind, I will be happy because my long-range plans include the man who can't come." So I was a knight in the Mardi Gras in 1930 here in Mobile. I had a heck of a good time.

Then I got stationed around at all kinds of jobs. I lived at the shipyards in Pascagoula for a couple of weeks learning to weld. They let me put a cot up in a sail loft to save money. I also lived on a dredge, the dredge Wahalak, out of Gulfport, and I did every job [for] three days. One day standing around watching and being told what to do; the next day doing it with someone standing around watching and telling me if I did something wrong: the third day they just walked off and left me. I was an oiler, and a fireman, and a deckhand, and a dredge runner, and a steward, and the captain on that basis. It just happened that my bride-to-be was staying down at Biloxi with her family, so every time I had any time off, I took off and went in and spent it with her, slept on her porch, and then came back. I had it down pretty good for a while there. I found out if I worked eight hours, then eight hours more, and then slept eight hours, and then worked one more shift, I could be gone about a full day-and-a-half. But it kind of got to me after awhile on the sleeping. But it worked out.

Later that year, in September, I was ordered to Fort Benning. We agreed that we'd get married after I got to Benning, had quarters, was oriented in my outfit, and so on. So I reported to Benning in early September 1930. I reported to the 7th Engineers, which was a regiment, only it was a regiment minus everything but the first platoon of A Company. So we actually had about 35 enlisted men and two officers.        was the second officer, and First Lieutenant Ben Fowlkes was the commander.<sup>24</sup> That was the demonstration unit from the Engineer viewpoint for the infantry

school. It was extremely interesting because it was a little bit off by itself. Nobody bothered with it too much. We did what Ben Fowlkes thought it was a good idea to do. If the post needed something done, the post executive officer usually called up and asked us if we could do it and if we should do it, and we'd say yes or no and they'd let it go at that.

I got quarters and then we set up the wedding, and I took six classmates of mine from Benning with me for the wedding in Tuscaloosa, including my four-year roommate as my best man, and four groomsmen and a spare. We married on October 4, 1930, and then went on back to Benning after a honeymoon at West Point. My bride. had never been near the Army until that stage and she started learning things beginning right then, and learning fast.

A year later I became the commanding officer of the 7th Engineer Regiment. In those days the Chief of Engineers put out a book listing the regiments and their commanders. There was "7th Engineers, Second Lieutenant Walter K. Wilson, commanding." This came out about every three to six months. And each time a new issue came out, I'd get a letter from a reserve officer somewhere up in Ohio stating that I was falsely occupying that position, that he was the commanding officer of the 7th Engineer Regiment. I said, "Well, you write that to the Chief of Engineers because I don't care." Nothing ever happened, but that went on and on. I don't know what it was really about. But it was really just a platoon. That's what it amounted to. I had been commanding officer alone for a couple of months when the post executive officer called me in and said, "Weary, have **you** got a lieutenant reporting to you today?" I said, "I don't know, sir." He said, "Well, I think you must have." I said, "Well, how do you know he's for me?" "Well," he said, "there's a young man with castles on, dressed to the hilt with his boots shined and his yellow gloves on, **and** he's wandering around up here at headquarters. Come up and rescue him. He doesn't know what to do with himself." So I went up there, and it was Steve Hanmer, a future major general in the Corps of Engineers.<sup>25</sup> Steve showed up and he was green. He'd just washed out